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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Joseph Ritson, A Critical Biography. By HENRY ALFRED BURD.
University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature,
Vol. II, No. 3, August, 1916. Pp. 224.

Joseph Ritson, A Critical Biography, is an important contribution to the literature dealing with the scholarly background of English Romanticism during the late eighteenth century. Without ignoring or condoning Ritson's many shortcomings, Dr. Burd shows that the literary and antiquarian work of the little Stockton conveyancer possesses a significance far greater than has generally been recognized. Because of unreasoning prejudice and violent language, Ritson was disregarded by most of his contemporaries and by posterity has been well-nigh forgot; but, thanks to Dr. Burd, he is at last revealed as a scholar and a critic who, by his passion for accuracy and his tremendous grasp of fact, rebuked an age of intellectual dishonesty, and who, by an acumen at times little short of inspiration, enunciated theories to which the scholarly world has finally returned after long and bitter controversies.

Besides helping to save from oblivion one of the greatest pioneers of modern scholarship, Dr. Burd draws attention (p. 170, note) to the importance of investigating "the part played by ethnological and linguistic theories in the literary movements of the late eighteenth century." His conviction that the vogue of Ossian was partly due to feelings of racial kinship would doubtless have been strengthened by a perusal of Rudolph Tombo's *Ossian in Germany* (New York, 1901; especially pp. 67, 71) and P. Van Tieghem's *Ossian en France* (Paris, I [1917], pp. 192 ff.), which latter, however, did not appear till after the publication of Dr. Burd's dissertation.

The following comments are inspired less by a hypercritical mania of the Ritsonian type than by a desire to assist further in the work of salvaging Ritson's scholarly reputation.

In discussing the question of Ritson's attitude toward Greek (p. 14), Dr. Burd overlooks a passage in the *Annals of the Caledonians*, etc. (I [1828], 54, note), which shows that, however contemptuous Ritson may have been toward that language during his early years, he finally came to respect it. Moreover, Ritson's words, if written with his customary candor, imply that his quotation from Dion Cassius in Latin translation was due more to the common ignorance of Greek among his readers than to his own inability to construe a Greek text, at least with the help of a translation. His

words are: "The text of Dio is well known to be in Greek, but that language being far less cultivated than the Roman (a preference, at the same time, much to be lamented), it appeared most proper to adopt the Latin version, which accompanies the original; being not only the work of a good scholar, but, likewise, faithful and literal, so far at least as the idioms of the two languages will allow." A little Welsh and Irish might perhaps be added to the linguistic stock in trade which Dr. Burd attributes to Ritson (pp. 14 f.).

In connection with the discussion of Ritson as a critic of Shakespeare, attention may be called to the notes on Macbeth and related personages who figure in Scottish legendary history (*Annals of the Caledonians*, II, 106, note; 110, note; 114, notes; 240, 333, note; 334, note). Ritson's observations (*op. cit.*, II, 120), designed to prove that the historical Macbeth "had no issue," are not mentioned in the *New Variorum Shakespeare* among the critical comments on Macduff's words in the play (IV, iii, 216), although others no more pertinent are quoted. The student of popular poetry would have welcomed a more nearly complete account of the scanty though precious evidence of Ritson's connection with Scott in the matter of ballad collecting and editing. (See, for example, Andrew Lang, *Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy*, 1910, pp. 24 f.) Dr. Burd asserts (p. 137) that Wissmann finally overthrew Ritson's contention that *King Horn* is derived from a French original, but, although Brandl (Paul's *Grundriss*, II, 1, p. 624) and Gröber (*Grundriss*, p. 573) incline to regard the source as English, Schofield (*Eng. Lit. from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* [1906], p. 261) derives the *Gest* from a lost French poem (cf. Northup, *Jour. of Eng. and Germ. Philol.*, IV [1902], 539), and Nelles (*Jour. of Am. Folk-Lore*, XXII [1909], 53) asserts that "recent students of the story are tolerably agreed . . . that a French version of some sort must stand back of these two romances" (*Horn et Rimenild* and *King Horn*). For confirmation of Ritson's opinion that *Richard Cœur de Lion* is of genuine English growth Dr. Burd cites (p. 155, n. 21) the editors of *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, but Schofield (*op. cit.*, p. 314) and Wells (*Bibliog. of the Writings in Middle English* [1916], p. 152) accept as authentic the references in the text of the romance to a French source. Judged by the amount of space devoted to others of Ritson's works, *King Arthur* appears to deserve more attention than Dr. Burd has seen fit to bestow upon it. As may be seen from a reading of Fletcher's *Arthurian Material in the Chronicles* ([Harvard] *Studies and Notes*, X [1906]) and Windisch's "Das keltische Britannien bis zu Kaiser Arthur" (*Abhandl. der königl. sächs. Gesell. der Wissn.*, Phil.-Hist. Kl., XXIV [1912]) in connection with *King Arthur*, the problems discussed by Ritson are frequently those still regarded as important, and the conclusions reached are in an astonishingly large number of cases essentially those of the best recent authorities. For example, Ritson treats of such matters as the date of Geoffrey's *Historia*, the origin of the Round Table, the return

of Arthur, Glastonbury and the grave of Arthur, and Arthur in the lives of Welsh saints; but Ritson's book is now being investigated by a former student of the University of Chicago, and I must not anticipate her results.

Lowth's *De sacra poesi Hebræorum* and Brown's *Rise . . . of Poetry and Music*, because of their importance as expressions of eighteenth-century opinion regarding the origin and progress of primitive literature, should be added to the sources of Ritson's "Historical Essay . . . on National Song" alluded to by Dr. Burd (p. 150). The "Essay" itself contains much significant material for which Dr. Burd apparently found no space. Ritson's assertion that "we are . . . to look for the simplicity of the remotest periods among the savage tribes of America" is interesting in connection with the growing tendency during the eighteenth century to attribute to the aborigines of the New World modes of thought and of poetic expression which, according to contemporary scholars, were characteristic of the Northern scalds, the ancient Celtic bards, and the minstrels of the Middle Ages. In support of his opinion Ritson quotes four stanzas from "The Death-Song of a Cherokee Indian," "which," he says, "are handed about in manuscript, and have not, it is believed, already appeared in print" (*English Songs*, I [1813], ii, note). According to Park, the editor of Ritson's work, the poem is "the acknowledged production of the very accomplished Mrs. John Hunter," but J. L. Onderdonk (*Hist. of American Verse*, Chicago, 1901, pp. 80 f.) claims that Mrs. Hunter merely appropriated with slight alterations the work of the American poet Philip Freneau. Onderdonk, who notes the appearance of Freneau's version in the *American Museum* for January, 1787, knows nothing of Ritson's quotation from Mrs. Hunter's form four years previously.¹ Freneau has been regarded as one of the earliest sympathetic interpreters of Indian character, and the "Death-Song" appears to have been popular on both sides of the Atlantic. It is strikingly similar to the closing lines of Campbell's "Gertrude of Wyoming," and was quoted in Mrs. Hunter's form by Henry Clay in his speech on the Seminole War delivered in January, 1819. Ritson also translates into English prose Montaigne's "original Caribbean song." Montaigne's French had already served as the source of the elder Thomas Warton's "American Love-Ode" (*Poems* [1748], p. 139), which in turn may have suggested Gray's inclusion of American songs among "the illustrations of poetic Genius" to be found in the literatures of "the remotest and most uncivilized nations" (note to "The Progress of Poesie"). See Farley, *Scand. Influences in the Eng. Rom. Movement* [1903], p. 66, n. 2, where Ritson's translation is referred to. As an example of nature poetry among

¹ According to Onderdonk, the "Death-Song" appeared in the *American Museum* "with no name attached." In the third edition it is, however, attributed to "P. Freneau" (*The American Museum* for January, 1787, Vol. I, No. 1 [Philadelphia, 1790], p. 77), and is printed as his in *The Poems of Philip Freneau*, ed. F. L. Pattee. II (1903), 313.

the ancient Scandinavians Ritson refers especially to the "Descent of Odin" and the "Death Song of Regner Lodbrog," both of which had already received distinguished attention at the hands of English critics and versifiers. The importance of Ritson's "Historical Essay" for eighteenth-century interest in Scandinavian is discussed by Farley, whose book should be consulted for other remarks on Ritson and his work (see especially pp. 101 ff.).

In the field of Welsh literature Ritson is acquainted with Evans' *Specimens*, and, although he accepts the contemporary exaggerated estimate of the antiquity of the poems attributed to Taliesin and Llywarch Hen, his account of the bards is, generally speaking, ahead of his time. He insists on applying the methods of scholarship to Sir J. Wynne's story that Edward I exterminated the Welsh bards, although the tradition, because of its romantic suggestions, had met with wide popularity through Carte's *History of England* and Gray's "Bard," and he succeeds in completely disproving its authenticity. Yet Ritson's discussion was entirely unknown to Stephens, who nearly three-quarters of a century later presented the historical evidence in his *Literature of the Kymry* (first edition, 1849, p. 104), and to Professor Phelps, who refers only to Stephens as having "exploded the tradition" (*Selections from Gray*, p. 157). As could easily be shown from an examination of other passages in the "Essay," Ritson combined in an astonishing fashion the most advanced scholarly opinions with the most romantic contemporary theories regarding the mind of primitive man, the constitution of society in "a state of nature and simplicity," and the origins of language and of poetry. Moreover, his historical survey of English song-writers shows a genuine appreciation of good poetry which is too frequently overlooked even by those who recognize his services to scholarship.¹

Dr. Burd's conjecture that Ritson would have espoused the theory of individual authorship for the popular ballads would doubtless have gained support from a consideration of the eighteenth-century theories regarding nature poetry which obviously inspired certain statements in Ritson's prefaces. In a passage quoted by Dr. Burd (p. 157) he asserts that genuine ballads must be sought among people who, "destitute of the advantages of science and education, and perhaps incapable of committing the pure inspiration of nature to writing," "actually felt the sensations they describe," and he implies that "the vulgar songs composed and sung during the civil wars of York and Lancaster" (the loss of which he deploras) were composed during a period "in which almost every moment afforded

¹ Dr. Burd appears to have missed a series of keen critical comments recorded by Ritson in a copy of John Scott's *Critical Essays* which was purchased by Charles Lamb at the sale of Ritson's books. Ritson's notes and the remarks of Scott, to which they apply, were transcribed by Lamb for the *London Magazine*, April, 1823, and are to be found among Lamb's *Essays*. (See Lamb's *Complete Works*, ed. Shepherd [London, 1875], pp. 437 ff.)

some great, noble, interesting or pathetic subject, for the imagination of the poet" (*Eng. Songs*, I, lxxv). Whatever may have been Ritson's opinion regarding the question of ballad authorship, which has assumed such importance since his day, he would undoubtedly have agreed with Professor Kittredge that "the traditional ballad appears to be inimitable by any person of literary cultivation" (Child's *Ballads*, one vol. ed., p. xxix), and, judged by his observations on Pinkerton's forgeries (*Gent. Mag.*, Vol. LIV, Part II [1784], No. 5, pp. 812 ff.), he would hardly have been deceived even by Andrew Lang's clever imitations of popular ballads written in answer to Professor Kittredge's challenge. Dr. Burd observes (p. 158, n. 37) that Ritson was always outspoken against the Ossianic imposture, but he fails to record Ritson's statements that Macpherson's epics "are undoubtedly very ingenious, artful, and, it may be, elegant compositions" (*Eng. Songs*, I, xlv), and that the author "has made great use of some unquestionably ancient Irish ballads" (*Robin Hood*, 2d ed., I [1832], xcvi, note)—both of which judgments are not far behind the best that modern criticism can accomplish (cf. *Mod. Phil.*, XVI [1918], 446 f.). The significance of Ritson's conclusion is enhanced by the discovery that he was acquainted with genuine Ossianic tradition (cf. *Annals of the Caledonians*, etc., I [1828], 88, note).

In several other matters connected with Celtic Ritson's opinions deserve consideration both because they show a startlingly modern attitude toward early theories and because they have been so largely ignored by recent authorities. When, for example, Ritson denominates "hasty and unfounded" the assertion of Edward Lhuyd, that "the original inhabitants of Britain were . . . *Guydhels*, or *Guydhelians*" (*Annals of the Caledonians*, etc., I, 13), he anticipates the view of two distinguished modern Celtists—Kuno Meyer (*Trans. Hon. Soc. of Cymmrodorion* [1895–96], p. 69) and Alexander Macbain (Skene's *Highlanders of Scotland* [Stirling, 1902], p. 383), whose theories represent a reaction against the more popular hypotheses of Rhŷs and D'Arbois, reflected in Deniker's *Races of Man*, to which Dr. Burd refers for "a statement of modern views concerning the peoples of Europe, especially the Celts" (p. 169, n. 75). Ritson's repudiation of the equation between *Scotti* and *Scythici* (*Annals of the Caledonians*, etc., II, 5, note) is significant in an age when the Scots were frequently asserted to have come from Scythia. His discussion of the Cassiterides (*Memoirs of the Celts or Gauls* [1827], pp. 290 ff.) should be compared with Holmes's summary of the evidence (*Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar* [Oxford, 1907], pp. 483 ff.), and his note on *Hibernia* and its analogues (*Annals of the Caledonians*, etc., II, 3, note) should be read in conjunction with Rhŷs's treatment of the word (*Proc. Brit. Acad.* I [reprint], 11 ff.). It is highly characteristic of the history of Ritson's reputation that one of the most recent historians of early Wales,¹

¹ J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (Longmans, 1911), I, 191 f.

in an elaborate and heavily documented note tracing the various explanations of the name *Cymry*, says nothing of Ritson's highly respectable discussion of the word (*Annals of the Caledonians*, etc., I, 16, note) nor of Ritson's indignant protest against Pinkerton's attempt to connect the *Cymry* with the *Cimbri*, although he mentions the fanciful etymologies of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Theophilus Evans and even takes account of the vaporizing of George Borrow. Holmes (*Ancient Britain*, p. 418, note) takes note of Borlase's advocacy of the theory that the Caledonians were Germans, but says nothing of Ritson's contrary opinion, although it is that of the most modern authorities. Dr. Burd implies (pp. 170 f.) that recent opinion substantiates Ritson's thesis that the Picts were Celts, but the question is still *sub iudice*. Except the late D'Arbois de Jubainville, probably few recent Celticists of high standing would admit that the evidence justifies even so much as the assertion that the Picts were Aryans (cf. Holmes, *op. cit.*, pp. 409 ff.). One of Ritson's chief services in this connection is his contention, in opposition to Pinkerton, that the Picts were not Germanic. It is to be noted, however, that the tradition of Pinkerton is still influential in that monument of misguided industry, David MacRitchie's *Testimony of Tradition* (London, 1890). Had MacRitchie utilized even such data as are accessible in the works of Ritson, he would have avoided much fantastic theorizing on the origin of British folk traditions. Attention should certainly be drawn to Ritson's valuable bibliography (in part critical) of books on Celtic languages and antiquities contained in *The Memoirs of the Celts or Gauls* (pp. 318 ff.) and to the justness of his estimate of such works as those of Pelloutier, Mallet, and Stukeley. A full discussion of Ritson's investigations in Celtic antiquities and of his vision, even through a glass darkly, of the facts of ancient British history would require far more space than can be devoted to the matter here. In any case, an adequate notion of the problems attacked by Ritson can hardly be derived from the brief summary of modern opinion contained in Deniker's little handbook, to which Dr. Burd refers.

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A Register of Middle English Religious & Didactic Verse. Part I. List of Manuscripts. By CARLETON BROWN. Oxford: Printed for the Bibliographical Society, at the University Press, 1916. Pp. xv+528.

In a Foreword the compiler explains the purpose and scope of his work, which unlike other Middle English bibliographies is based on the manuscripts. The first volume, arranged according to libraries, takes up the manuscripts which contain Middle English religious and didactic verse, and gives a list of all items of that character found in each. This volume is to be followed by a second, which will contain "an alphabetical index of